VOL. 7, NO. 1—OCTOBER 2006

SCHOOLSCAPES

WORKING TOGETHER

Summary

SCHOOLS IN TOUCH AND IN TUNE: Communication at the Centre of the Education Reform 3

COMMUNICATING MEANS TAKING THE TIME TO LISTEN 4

THE EVALUATION OF LEARNING: Information Sheets 4.1

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AS A MEANS OF DEALING WITH CHANGE 5

ENHANCING LEARNING THROUGH DISCUSSION, LISTENING AND SHARING 6

PILOT SCHOOLS: Different Schools, Similar Methods 6

ETHICS AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE 8

AND WHAT ARE YOU READING? Report on a Fascinating Conference 10

A Closer Look at Some of the Workshops 11.1

Detecting Reading Difficulties in Students Entering Secondary School 11.3

REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON *NEW APPROACHES, NEW SOLUTIONS:* Sharing Success 12

SPECIAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE: *SUCCESS BASED ON DIFFERENCES* 13

CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO STAY IN SCHOOL 14

THE POLICY ON SPECIAL EDUCATION: HOW FAR HAVE WE COME? 15

AGREEMENT ON THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF SERVICES BETWEEN THE MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX AND THE MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT 15.1

BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS: DO WE TOLERATE THE INTOLERABLE, OR EDUCATE CHILDREN? 15.2

BLUE METROPOLIS: A LITERARY FESTIVAL WITH A SPECIAL COMPONENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE 16

THE STUDENT LITERARY PROGRAM AT BLUE METROPOLIS 20

SECONDARY SCHOOL PARLIAMENTS 22

THE INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON THE HARMONIZATION OF ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS 22

Québec

2007-03565/

Every day we communicate with one another. In this period of educational change, however, communication takes on particular importance. Because it can always be improved, communication seemed a fitting theme for the province-wide meeting on the education reform held last May 1 and 2.

In this issue of *Schoolscapes*, communication takes centre stage once again, for now more than ever, the education system must rely on clear, effective communication to help those involved in the reform see the changes that are taking place in a broader context. Communication in schools and between schools and their communities was covered from various angles in the presentations and workshops as well as in the virtual storefront presenting ministries and public agencies that produce educational materials for the school system.

Because a love of reading and curiosity about books are definite assets for students, this issue also looks at reading and youth. In 2005-2006, two literary events were organized with young people in mind. We hope that the articles on the conference *And What Are You Reading?* and the *Blue Metropolis* festival reflect the passion for reading that we discovered among the participants, in addition to providing ideas for activities to carry out with students.

The wide-ranging subject matter in this issue gives a good indication of the many activities sparked by the reform. During the 2006-2007 school year, the implementation of the reform will proceed in Secondary Cycle Two and we will continue to keep our readers informed of developments.

Colette Boucher and Martine Labrie

Diane Charest and Gilbert Moisan, Service de la recherche
Direction de la recherche, des statistiques et des indicateurs, MELS

THE MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT RELEASES *SCHOOLS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THEIR COMMUNITY: SUMMARY OF AN EXPLORATORY STUDY*

The 10 case studies presented in this publication highlight different characteristics of school-community partnerships and shed light on the conditions that allow for the emergence and sustainability of such relationships, as well as related issues and challenges.

The study defines three conceptual models for classifying schools according to how relationships with the community are organized. The **shared school** is based on a corporate vision and aims first and foremost to respond to administrative issues. The **expanded school** is also based on a corporate vision, but it is educational issues that provide the impetus to collaborate with other organizations. The **networked school** is based on a development vision in response to social issues. The school is involved in the collective initiative and the group of stakeholders is seen as a community project.

These relationships are based on demographics, such as fluctuations in enrollment, social issues or school or municipal projects. Schools and communities can maintain different types of relationships, including relationships of complementarity, relationships of a political and co-developmental nature, and relationships of usage. They are accompanied by user agreements, service agreements or agreements of a political nature.

The sustainability of the partnerships is based on the renewal of a common vision, communication and trust, and advantages for each party. Finally, the study identifies four major challenges faced by schools that wish to develop partnerships with the community: the availability of human resources, organizational difficulties, managing shared material resources, and safety and the general climate.

This publication is a summary of a research report produced by a team at the Université de Sherbrooke led by Paul Prévost. It can be found at the following address:
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/stat/recherche/index.htm

SCHOOLSCAPES

Schoolscapes *is under the responsibility of the Secteur de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et secondaire*

Pierre Bergevin, Assistant Deputy Minister
Secteur de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et secondaire

Margaret Rioux-Dolan, Director, Direction générale de la formation des jeunes

In conjunction with the Services à la communauté anglophone

Noel Burke, Assistant Deputy Minister
Secteur des Services à la communauté anglophone

Liette Michaud-Hedge, Director
Direction de la production en langue anglaise

Publication Director: *Colette Boucher*

Editors-in-Chief: *Colette Boucher, Martine Labrie*

Coordinator: *Martine Labrie*

Contributors: *Colette Boucher, Réjane Bougé, Aline Buron, Diane Charest, Sophie Gaudreault, Louis-P. Huard, Martine Labrie, Marie-Josée Lépine, Gilbert Moisan, Philip Szporer*

Translation and Revision: *Direction de la production en langue anglaise*

Photographers: *Denis Garon, François Nadeau*

Graphic Design: *Emmanuel Bégin*

Publication Assistant: *Denise Thériault*

Printing Coordinator:
Michel Martel, Direction des communications

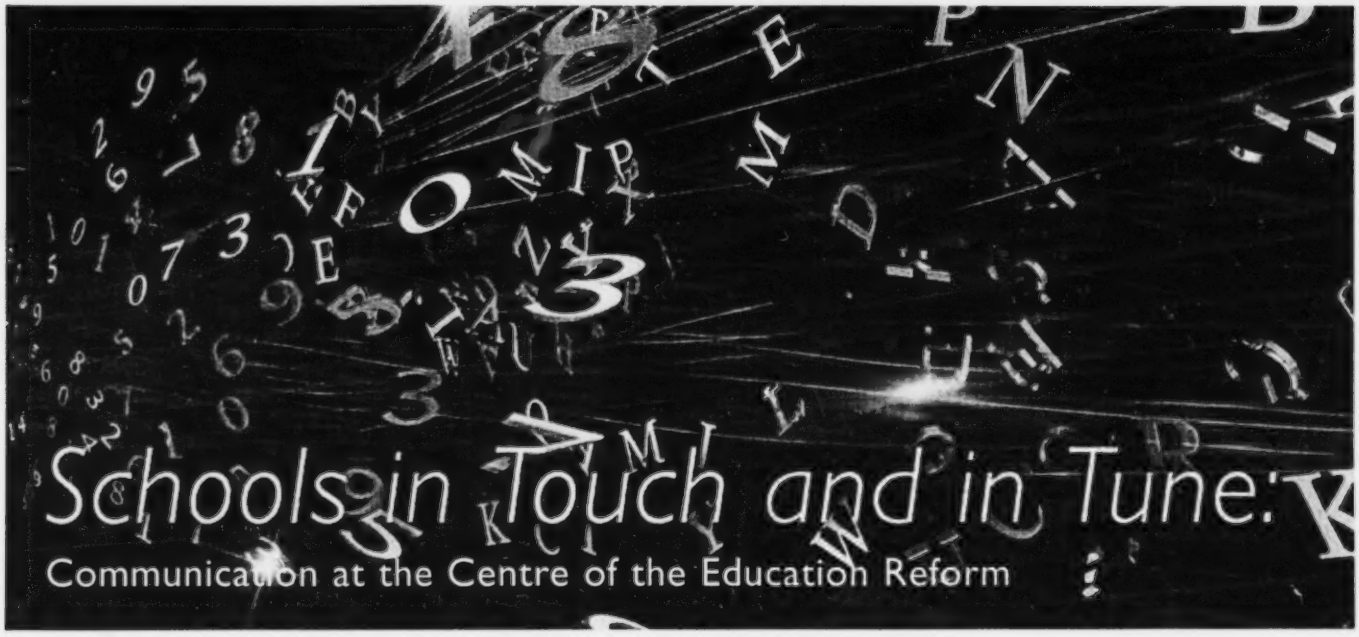
Distribution:
France Pleau, Direction des ressources matérielles

Ministry Code 13-0000-50A

ISSN: *1488-3066 (print)*
ISSN: *1488-3074 (on-line)*

Circulation: *10 000 copies*

Next Issue: *January 2007*



Schools in Touch and in Tune:

Communication at the Centre of the Education Reform

Marie-Josée Lépine

The education reform steering committee faces a number of challenges. Pierre Bergevin, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, explained his view of things: "The steering committee is focusing on development and regulation. We must provide continued support for the network at the elementary level. At the same time, we must ensure that work can proceed at the secondary level. It's an ambitious project, but this is how Québec schools are going to evolve."

Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director general of education in the youth sector, and Gérard Guimont, program director at the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes, gave a progress report on certain initiatives currently under way.

Applied general education paths

Rioux-Dolan pointed out that, as of 2007-2008, different paths will be available in Secondary Cycle Two: general education, applied general education and work-oriented training. Students will be able to choose the path they prefer, although the requirements will be the same across the board. According to Rioux-Dolan, "these programs were created in order to meet students' needs and respect their choices as much as possible. Each path is a different way of obtaining the same diploma."

Better evaluation tools

With respect to the evaluation of learning, Rioux-Dolan mentioned that prototype examinations and evaluation situations for elementary and secondary school are currently in development. They will be made available until 2012, as they are developed.

As well, a committee made up of the main partners has been formed to study the application of the policy on the evaluation of learning. The committee's mandate is to identify lines of action and to produce seven information sheets on the evaluation of learning.

Each sheet will contain questions and answers proposed and validated by members of the committee, as well as the main instructions and guidelines contained in the ministerial frameworks, in order to clarify aspects of the policy. Three of these sheets are now available on the MELS Web site. The first addresses cross-curricular competencies, the second, the importance of teachers' professional judgment and the third, the evaluation of student progress and evaluation with respect to requirements. Subsequent information sheets will address the following topics: the evaluation of subject-specific competencies and the role of knowledge, communicating results, differentiation in evaluation, and students' progress through school.

Although these sheets are intended to help with evaluation, Rioux-Dolan warns that "they should not be used as a substitute for the ministerial frameworks, but rather to trigger reflection on the renewal of evaluation practices and to enhance teachers' understanding of problems by referring them to the appropriate sections of the ministerial frameworks."

THE EVALUATION OF LEARNING: INFORMATION SHEETS

Sophie Gaudreault

The information sheets distributed at the provincial meeting in May were developed by the committee on the evaluation of learning policy. The mandate of the committee, which is made up of different players, is to study the elements of the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning and its application, produce a progress report on the implementation of the policy, identify solutions and measures for ensuring its success, recommending adjustments for its successful implementation to the steering committee, and, if necessary, making recommendations concerning certain components of the policy.

Communicating Means Taking the Time to Listen

Marie Josée Lépine

There are three types of spontaneous remarks that can be heard in the hallway or the cafeteria, or at formal meetings. The two most common are criticisms of the education reform and the lack of resources. "The comments most likely to help steer the reform are buried in the third layer," explains Tehami. School principals must be alert to spontaneous remarks that directly relate to students.

After that, the remarks must be decoded. For example, Tehami explained that a lament such as the following, "My students just cut and paste the first thing they find on the Internet," might be saying, "My students are lacking in at least two cross-curricular competencies: *Uses information* and *Exercises critical judgment*." We can see how the QEP can be presented as a source of solutions rather than a list of instructions. "Spontaneous remarks can be extremely useful if school principals take the time to decode and reformulate them," adds Tehami.

Active listening can also foster mobilization. "When staff members feel that their comments can effect change, they are more likely to want to participate in projects presented as solutions to problems encountered." In this context, the education reform is not a series of disconnected instructions. Rather, it is "an answer to the difficulties expressed by staff members."

In response to participants' questions, Tehami specified that reputedly negative leaders are a rich source of the first two types of spontaneous remarks. They can be convinced to get on board, however, when their remarks are of the third type, i.e. related to their students. All you need to do is listen.

Aline Buron

Evaluation of Learning: Information Sheets

Background

The information sheets distributed at the provincial meeting in May 2006 were developed by the committee on the evaluation of learning policy set up by the education reform steering committee.

The committee is made up of three school board representatives, three teacher representatives, one parent representative, one representative of private schools, one representative of the MELS/university committee and four MELS representatives, including Pierre Bergevin, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education.

The committee's mandate is to:

- study the elements of the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning and their applicability
- produce a progress report on the implementation of the policy and identify solutions and measures for ensuring its success
- recommend adjustments for the successful implementation of the policy to the steering committee and, if necessary, make recommendations concerning certain components of the policy

The committee's initial reflections led to the adoption of three lines of action for carrying out its mandate.

- The first is to clarify information about the different aspects of the evaluation of learning by producing information sheets.
- The second is to analyze problems: identify and analyze difficulties raised by the application of the policy, propose solutions and determine who is responsible for implementing solutions.
- The third is to produce a report on the main observations and recommendations made.

Information sheets

From the outset, committee members noticed that the information about the evaluation of learning contained in the ministerial frameworks, including the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning, was sometimes being interpreted very differently in the schools. They therefore decided to clarify several aspects of the evaluation of learning by developing information sheets on the following topics:

- Evaluation of cross-curricular competencies
- The importance of teachers' professional judgment
- Evaluation of student progress and evaluation with respect to requirements
- Evaluation of subject-specific competencies and the role of knowledge
- Communicating results
- Differentiation in evaluation
- Students' progress through school

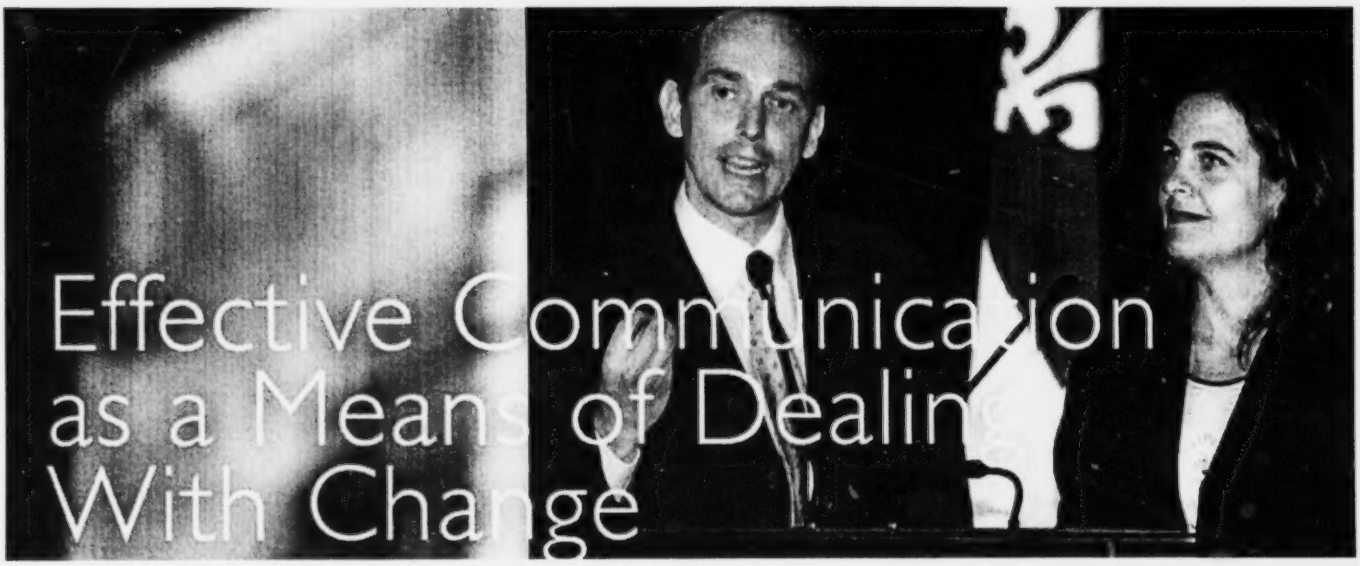
In order to clear up certain misunderstandings concerning the evaluation of learning, the committee agreed to address the most common questions raised by teachers, school principals and parents with respect to each of the topics.

As a result, the first part of each sheet contains questions and answers proposed and validated by members of the committee. The second part contains instructions and guidelines in the main ministerial frameworks that deal with the topic in question. These are primarily the references that were used to formulate the answers, for example, the *Education Act*, the basic school regulations, the QEP, the evaluation policy and the frameworks for the evaluation of learning.

Thus, the information contained in the sheets takes into account the points of view of every member of the committee. Moreover, since the sheets are submitted to the steering committee for approval before distribution, they are the result of a consensus on the aspects of evaluation addressed.

In addition to the sheets distributed at the provincial meeting in May 2006, i.e. on the evaluation of cross-curricular competencies, the importance of teachers' professional judgment, the evaluation of student progress and evaluation with respect to requirements, four more sheets will soon be made available on the Web site of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. English versions of all the information sheets are forthcoming.

It is important to note that the initial reaction to these sheets in the schools has been positive. Many educators appreciate being able to refer to a summary of the information about a particular aspect of evaluation. However, it is important to remember that although these sheets contain very useful information about certain aspects of the evaluation of learning, they should not be used as a substitute for the ministerial frameworks on the evaluation of learning. Schools are encouraged to use them to stimulate reflection on the renewal of the local framework for the evaluation of learning, especially with respect to the terms and conditions of evaluation and pass/fail and placement rules. They are then encouraged to become more familiar with these aspects of the evaluation of learning by referring to the ministerial frameworks themselves.



Effective Communication as a Means of Dealing With Change

Marie-Josée Lépine

According to Turpin and Gaumont, "although it is true that providing information is a means of communicating, communication in itself is far more complex." Since we also communicate with body language, and since people often remember gestures more readily than words, in times of change it is preferable to adopt a certain number of rules of conduct, the most important of which is being present. "In times of change," says Gaumont, "it is important to stay in touch with people on an individual basis as much as possible."

Second, communication is both functional (focused on content and the task at hand) and relational (focused on relationships and atmosphere). "Managing communications involves managing atmosphere and task simultaneously," says Turpin. Relationships are very important in times of change."

The speakers' third assumption is that "communication alternates between creating common ground and expressing differences." At any given time, two people's opinions will be either similar or different, but rarely the same. "There is no one way of representing reality. The idea is not to impose our vision of reality on others, but to learn that communicating involves expressing differences and influencing perceptions."

Finally, Turpin and Gaumont added that "communication is considered possible even when the level of agreement between the parties is limited and uncertain." Although the numbers show that communication tools reach only 30 per cent of their potential audience and that only 50 per cent of written or audio messages are retained, the fact remains that it is possible to communicate effectively. It is important, however, to repeat information and consult a variety of sources. In response to participants' questions, Gaumont suggested targeting both the right and left halves of the brain in every communication in order to reach as many people as possible.

Marie-Josée Lépine

Sophie Gaudreault

ENHANCING LEARNING THROUGH DISCUSSION, LISTENING AND SHARING

In the workshops, school administrators applied the main concepts addressed by the speakers. For example, one exercise focused on spontaneous remarks. Participants were asked to see how these comments could be used constructively in their school. They began by identifying spontaneous remarks they were used to hearing about the education reform, then decoded them and identified their spontaneous reactions and the communication strategies or tools that could be used in each case.

The two-day workshops gave participants an opportunity to discuss and reflect on communication management and to share strategies for helping them integrate the education reform into their practices.

Two principals and one teacher from three different pilot schools spoke of their experience at the provincial meeting. They talked about the advantages, disadvantages, ups, downs, and feelings of hope and despair. By all accounts it was not a restful experience! However, all three schools have made progress and are prepared to meet new challenges.

Training is essential

Jocelyne Cormier, a teacher at Cavelier-de-LaSalle school, was the first to speak. She admits that, at first, several teachers didn't want anything to do with the project. According to Cormier, the QEP resulted in four major changes affecting students, teachers, the conception of evaluation, and teaching materials. "Before the QEP, students were much more passive and the teacher's job was to transmit knowledge. Now students are much more active and we have taken on the role of guides, but we still transmit knowledge," says Cormier. "Evaluation is no longer an end in itself; it is a means of judging students' progress." Teaching materials have also changed: their role is now to complement learning situations.

According to Cormier, "it is important that school principals invest in training in order to further the implementation process. Training and information break down resistance and counter preconceived notions. Moreover, teachers must be given time to get together and develop learning situations. It is easier to implement the QEP if the groups aren't too big."

Teachers at Cavelier-de-LaSalle faced a number of challenges. "The first one was reading the QEP. Training is important, but if the teachers don't read the program, it won't do much good." Developing learning situations, working in teams and dealing with some teachers' resistance to change were some of the other challenges Jocelyne Cormier's school had to face. Of course, other challenges will arise in the coming months: the ongoing development and improvement of learning situations, continued training and teamwork and the integration of a multidisciplinary approach.

Totally C.R.A.Z.Y.

With humour and enthusiasm, George Singfield, principal of Symmes Middle School, compared his experience implementing the QEP with the Québec film C.R.A.Z.Y. "Through good times and bad the characters continue to grow and gain a better understanding of their lives. That's how I see the QEP." Singfield used the letters in the movie title to describe the conditions necessary for implementing the QEP: C for collaboration among teachers, students, administrators and parents; R for revision and constant improvement; A for action based on desire, ability and knowledge; Z for the zeal to succeed; and Y for yielding to a shared vision of the program's implementation.

"It is important to create an atmosphere of cooperation in the school. Every day, students receive 25 minutes of tutoring and every Wednesday they leave 100 minutes early so that the teachers have time to meet," continues the principal. The school developed a success plan in which students become familiar with the language of the QEP. Like those at Cavelier-de-LaSalle, teachers at the Gatineau school participate in several training sessions.

"Implementing the QEP changed our way of thinking about teaching, planning, evaluation and communication with parents," says the principal. Their first challenge was also reading the QEP, but the school soon realized that it had to leave its comfort zone.

If there were a miracle solution, we'd have it

After teasing participants with the "miracle solution" for implementing the QEP, Lise Lambert, principal at Jean-Jacques-Rousseau school spoke of her experience in a pilot school. First, she provided evidence that the QEP has been implemented in her school. "On a daily basis we speak of cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning. Some classrooms have posters listing the cross-curricular competencies. We speak of multiple intelligences, and more and more Cycle One teachers are evaluating competencies."

Like the two speakers who preceded her, Lambert mentioned that the first step was to read and understand the QEP. "The school established a 174-day schedule, giving teachers six full days for collaboration," she explained. These 174 days are equivalent to 180 five-hour days, or 900 classroom hours. In 2004-2005, days set aside for collaboration began with information about the reform. At Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, "formal lectures have given way to an approach in which students play an active role. It is no longer a matter of teaching and evaluating students who sit and listen passively, but of setting challenges, observing students and helping them take an active approach to learning," she continued.

According to Lambert, it is crucial to identify pedagogical leaders, since they are an important asset in a school. Jean-Jacques-Rousseau is also facing a number of challenges. "We must continue to believe in the QEP, even if it is not yet a way of life. Differentiation as a concept will have to be more fully integrated, and we will need training and accompaniment for that also," concludes Lambert.

Gérard Guimont, director of programs
Direction générale de la formation
des jeunes

Marie Josée Lépine
Rejane Bougé

Ethics and Religious Culture

"Professional development will be made available to 25 000 elementary and secondary school teachers," said Gérard Guimont at the provincial meeting, "so that, eventually, every school will have its own regional training plan team. The program will be applied at the elementary and secondary levels as of September 2008, but field-testing will begin this fall in selected schools."

Until the program is completed, a description of its main orientations has been made available to teachers.

It is important to point out that this is a nondenominational program that respects personal convictions and freedom of conscience and religion as stipulated in the charters of human rights and freedoms. It contains specific content related to ethics (reflections on community life and social issues) and religious culture.

"This is a knowledge-based program," emphasizes Guimont. The teacher's role is to focus on knowledge and competencies. The idea is to understand the different religions rather than to search for spiritual truths."

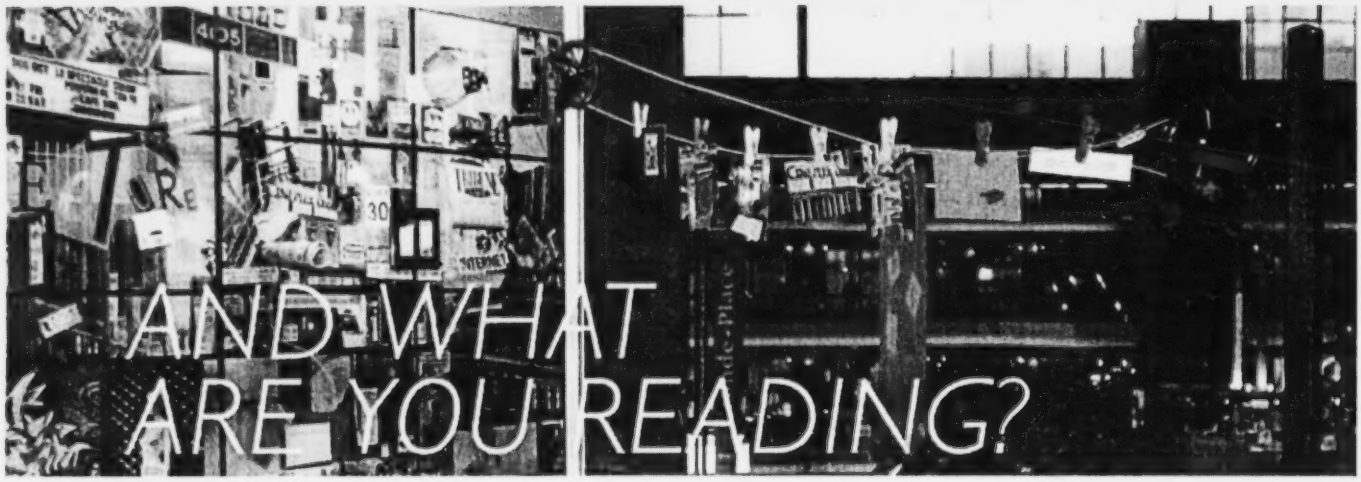
"The idea is to understand the different religions rather than to search for spiritual truths."

Field-Testing the Ethics and Religious Culture Program

The consultation process with committees of experts continues and, slowly but surely, the appropriate teacher training is being developed in the universities. Work on the implementation of the new program is moving forward. Well aware that this major change in orientation implies a radical paradigm shift with respect to the role played by teachers, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has been offering training in each of the regions since February.

This fall, another step will be taken. Several schools, most of them elementary schools, will begin field-testing the program. "By the end of the process, we will have reached 120 teachers," says Denis Watters, coordinator of the program development teams at the MELS. In order to ensure a significant sample, we included French- and English-language schools in the public and private sectors, as well as multiethnic schools. It is important to note that all students in these schools will be taking the program. It's a global commitment. The teachers received two days of training at the end of August and will have another three days over the course of the year. They will be accompanied by teams whose members will include the people who developed the program. "This is a very important step in validating the draft program. Nothing is set in stone. We have working documents that we want to test in real-life learning situations," explains Watters. "Then, of course, the participants will fill out questionnaires and we will collate the data. Some of the parameters of the field-test have already been set, so it is certain that we will need to take into account teachers' and students' reactions and competency development."

Following the field-test, the development teams will refine the program and its aims. For now, the goals have not changed: the ethics and religious culture program is intended to provide all students, without exception, with the tools they need to understand our society by having them share Québec's cultural and religious heritage and encouraging open-mindedness by helping them develop the ability to interact with others, while respecting cultural, social and religious differences. Now, more than ever before, is the time to encourage parents, school staff and students to rally around this program.



AND WHAT ARE YOU READING?

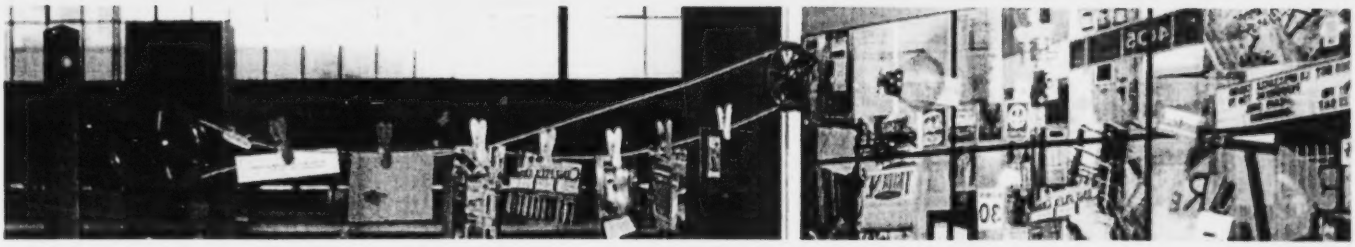
Réjane Bougé

More creative?

All preschool, elementary and secondary education teachers, education consultants, librarians and library technicians, as well as volunteer parents, were invited to participate in this vast reflection. The enthusiasm of sociologist Diane Pacom, who gave the opening address, set the tone for the ensuing discussions. The University of Ottawa professor emphasized the multifaceted and ephemeral identity of today's youth. "Young people are no longer at the centre of social action; they are not making their presence felt. We are faced with a fragmented generation, but a generation with a lot of creativity, perhaps more than any other." After discussing how young people today are labelled, Pacom pointed out that the baby boomers, who control our institutions and are in a position of power, are too often not demanding enough of these same young people.

A brief glance . . . at major questions

The plan of action on reading pays particular attention to boys, so some of the workshops focused on stimulating boys' interest in reading and providing the necessary support and supervision. These workshops discussed how to take advantage of boys' interests and suggested reading materials to get them "hooked." It would be impossible to list in this article all of the topics, thoughts and strategies proposed at the conference. We can only give a brief overview of the diversity and richness of some of the workshops, for example, the workshop on ÉLODIL, an acronym for Éveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique. Based on European initiatives, this Québec program uses contact and play with a variety of languages to make preschool children aware of linguistic and cultural diversity and to help them develop skills



that will enable them to learn to read and write. The program includes a number of tools and structured activities for everyday classroom use, and was well-received by those working in multiethnic communities rich in linguistic diversity. Once considered an obstacle, such diversity, in the light of ÉLODIL, becomes a valuable asset.

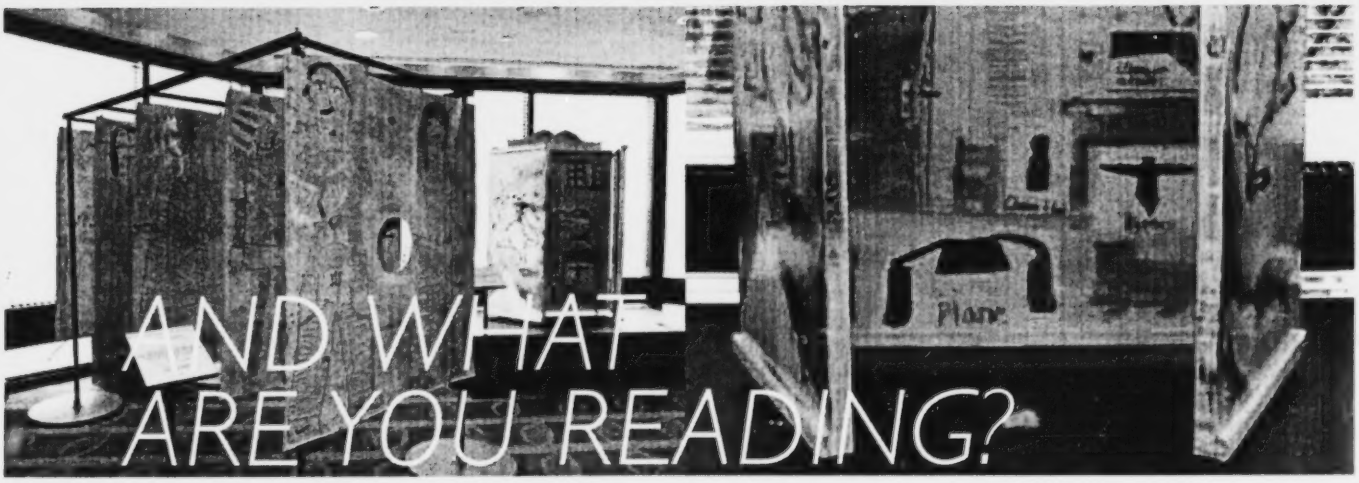
The workshop given by Martine Hart, education consultant at the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin, demonstrated that science and technology, often more interesting to boys, can be tied into literature. Using *Little Red Riding Hood*, the adventures of Tintin in *Destination Moon* and Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* as examples, Hart demonstrated the connection between science and literature. Piquing elementary school students' interest in science allows them to meet all of the objectives of the French programs: reading a variety of texts, communicating orally and appreciating literary works. Hart's presentation contained a wealth of ideas for making connections between two worlds that are often considered irreconcilable.

In her workshop, Suzanne Richard demonstrated how to teach students to read in every subject area and explained that the role of reading is different in each one. She spoke on "reading and writing in order to learn and achieve academic success." The university professor trains secondary school teachers to help their students develop their reading and writing skills. Also weighing in on the importance of student success, researchers and other educators emphasized the role of the school library. National and international studies have shown that close collaboration between teachers and librarians fosters success. The library is a natural extension of the classroom, the ideal place for practising differentiation. It is a place of intimacy and freedom for students.

Books and the joy of reading were constant themes throughout the conference, which ended with a very interesting version of *Little Red Riding Hood*—Little *Blue* Riding Hood—written and read by none other than Kim Yaroshevskaya, a.k.a. Fanfreluche, a television character from the 1960s.

During the conference and its many workshops, participants were able to forge closer ties, thereby ensuring students the richest possible resources. That was the ultimate goal of the event.

The *J'ai la tête à lire* recognition awards, launched in the wake of the action plan, were awarded in two categories at the conference: young people and educational institutions. The names of the winners can be found on the Web site of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (click on *Et toi, que lis-tu?*). For more ideas, you can also consult the section entitled *Mesures pour encourager la lecture, Florilèges*. The second edition will appear shortly.



AND WHAT ARE YOU READING?

Réjane Bougé

ÉLODIL: Éveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique

Québec's larger cities are characterized by cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Some 189 languages are spoken on the island of Montréal alone! The method proposed in the ÉLODIL project is therefore a valuable asset for the growing number of educators who work in multiethnic communities. The project introduces students to linguistic diversity through contact with different languages, and to the diversity of the people who speak these languages. Its main objective is to prepare students to live in a linguistically and culturally diverse society.

The project's underlying philosophy is based on play. To say that the aim is to help students develop their metaphonological skills is to say that they learn to play with sounds, rhymes and syllables. They have fun deliberately manipulating the different phonemes. Metaphonological skills help students read, write and understand words. The point is not merely to raise awareness of and legitimize the languages spoken by students from various communities. The program is also intended to emphasize the importance of French as a common language. Thus, it helps students learn French and understand its social and identity-building role in the group and the community. More importantly, you don't have to be an expert to introduce students to the diversity of languages thanks to the materials made available through ÉLODIL. Françoise Armand, professor of French as a second language (teacher training) at the Université de Montréal, and Samira Ababou, coordinator of the ÉLODIL project at the preschool level, agree. The teaching materials presented at the conference, large illustrated books recounting the adventures of a mischievous monkey, show how to play with words and syllables. These activities are intended for preschool and Elementary Cycle Three students. The project was developed in collaboration with CSDM school Simonne-Monet. For more information, visit the ÉLODIL Web site at

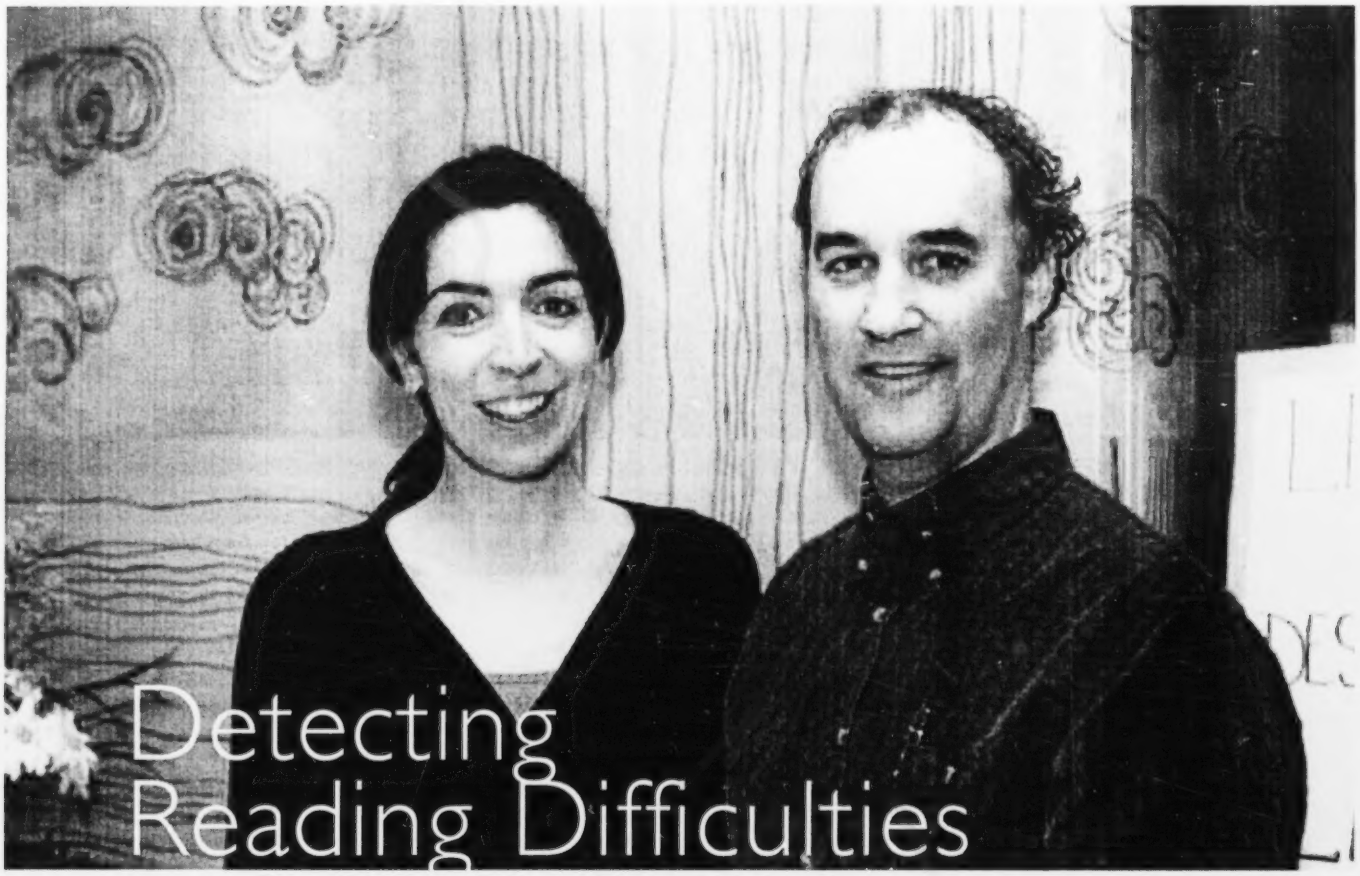
Blending science and technology with literature

Martine Hart, who has been an education consultant at the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin for many years, knows how to combine science and technology with literature. For some time now, she has been finding scientific and technological avenues to explore in children's magazines and literature, including fairytales, picture books, novels and comic books. Taking *Little Red Riding Hood* as a starting point, she developed a general study on the wolf. "Why are we afraid of wolves? What tells us that the wolf in the story is bad?" she asks her students. Then she talks about the wolf as an animal. "How do wolves behave? How to they live? What do we know about them?" In French class, students read the story, understand its structure, explore the character of the wolf in different activities and find the same character in other stories. They can even write a new version of the story or create an entirely different story about the wolf based on what they have learned. The class might even put on a play or a puppet show. The exercise can also help students enrich their vocabulary by encouraging them to find expressions containing the word "wolf." At the same time, in science class, students find and organize information about the wolf. They consult science publications to understand the environmental impact of human intervention on the wolf. Students could also produce posters, set up an information booth or publish a leaflet informing other students in the school of their discoveries. Hart proposes other activities based on the adventures of Tintin in *Destination Moon*, in which Professor Calculus points out that we only ever see one side of the moon, and Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Detailed bibliographies are available on the Web site of the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin ( ), under *Fenêtre pédagogique, Littérature, science et technologie*. The slide show Hart used in her presentation at the conference is also available. Science and technology are quite the story now that Martine Hart has found the perfect blend between art and science—a feat that is sure to be envied by all.

Learning to read more effectively

Suzanne Richard of the Université de Sherbrooke provides training to secondary school teachers to show them how to help their students read more effectively in every area, because reading and writing are the most cross-curricular of competencies! Although she is well aware that reading is an enormous factor in student success, she also believes that a number of avenues should be used to foster such success. In her opinion, it is necessary to intervene as early as possible, set up a range of services, oversee the interventions, think in the medium and long term, promote teamwork and focus on the educational aspect, in particular on the acquisition of basic skills, by encouraging students to read. "In secondary school," she points out, "reading lists are very rigid. Students are not encouraged to discuss knowledge, but to assimilate it. The texts presented are too often didactic rather than scientific." She also laments the fact that students are rarely required to write more elaborate texts. She believes that writing is used to transmit knowledge and support study and, most of the time, to control learning. And yet, every day, students are given a variety of texts to read, understand and interpret. Have we forgotten that reading is also used to assimilate content and learn? Richard also points out that there is a dimension of learning in writing. We write to construct and develop knowledge, express thoughts and reflect on issues. Reading is building meaning. In order to understand and interpret a text, it is necessary to make use of every dimension of the text, including its vocabulary, structure and organization and the repetition of information that ensures continuity and progression.

This being said, how do we help students? By identifying the reading problems inherent in the texts and by helping students make connections between types of texts, repetitions, vocabulary, continuity and sentence structure, while taking into account the reading process. Richard also pointed out that texts in different subject areas (i.e. science, technology, mathematics, social sciences, geography and history) pose different problems. She concluded by emphasizing that language is at the heart of learning and that we all have a responsibility in this area.



Detecting Reading Difficulties

A Key Factor in Student Success in Disadvantaged Communities

Louis P. Huard

At the provincial *And What Are You Reading?* conference on books and reading in Montréal on April 3 and 4, Raynald Goudreau, the principal of a group of three elementary schools and of Haute-Beauce secondary school under the Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin, and Marie-Claude Rodrigue, an education consultant, shared the experience they gained from applying a program to encourage students with learning difficulties to read.

"In order to foster student success, it is important to facilitate the transition between elementary and secondary school. Sometimes, as principal of a group of elementary and secondary schools in a rural community, the task is easier. Our situation enables us to ensure the continuity of individualized education plans and action plans for encouraging reading. We are true partners in students' success," says Goudreau.

Marie-Claude Rodrigue, who, in addition to being an education consultant, is also responsible for the New Approaches, New Solutions program at the school board, explains, "First, we

took measures to identify elementary school students with difficulties in order to take action as early as possible. We also set up a forum for discussion and information sharing. The sharing of resources is essential to achieving our objectives."

"A certain amount of reorganization was necessary to enable us to act more effectively," continues Goudreau. "For example, the NANS budget enables teachers to take time away from the classroom in order to collaborate and take action. We can apply our knowledge and develop innovative teaching practices to provide students with better accompaniment.

"We also have tools, including a common reference framework for students with reading difficulties," adds Goudreau, "which means that all players use the same vocabulary. We produced a screening tool to make it easier to identify students' difficulties. We evaluate the students' level of understanding of reading materials written by well-known authors. This facilitates the transition from elementary to secondary school."

"A common challenge is to build accountability for student success among the different players. The goal is to develop attitudes and habits that foster success. My role as principal is to remind people of the importance of their responsibility. For example, we have students with learning difficulties due to behavioural problems, which in turn are the result of a lack of sleep. This often hinders our efforts. In this case, my role is to intervene and to encourage parents to become partners in their children's success by adopting lifestyle habits at home that foster learning.

"It goes without saying that this is a long-term process. Evaluation is difficult, since students with problems will always lag behind their peers, even if they make progress. Parents get discouraged. We have observed that it is important to take changes in behaviour and habits into account. This is why we are considering how we could better reflect the students' progress.

"We implemented a means of evaluation using a portfolio, which enables us to paint a more accurate picture of the student's development so that everyone involved can take better action and adapt to the student's needs. This tool enables us to identify behaviours, attitudes and habits essential to success. In this way, the school can provide better monitoring."

"Throughout the student's schooling, we attempt to provide conditions that foster detection and intervention," explains Rodrigue. "We also want to know whether the students understand the value of their learning. We provide them with resources such as remedial teaching services and intensive reading clinics. Thanks to a common reference framework, we are able to ensure follow-up and help them develop reading strategies."

"In order to foster student success, it is necessary to gain the commitment and participation of everyone involved," says Goudreau, "and, thanks to the incorporation of a reading action plan into teaching practices, our project brings everything together."

Sharing Success

Each school implementing the New Approaches, New Solutions strategy was represented by about 10 people, mostly teachers, school principals and education consultants. They all took advantage of the opportunity to share their experiences. The meeting had two objectives: to foster networking and the sharing of expertise among staff at the schools and school boards involved, and to demonstrate the progress made since 2002.

In order to create an atmosphere of mutual assistance, the participants spent the morning divided into 15 groups, depending on their area of interest. A workshop leader had them share their opinions on a specific topic and describe their achievements and the difficulties encountered, and encouraged them to help each other find possible solutions.

Eleven topics were proposed. Moderated discussions addressed the implementation of the read-to-learn program (*Lire pour apprendre*), the guidance-oriented approach, leadership in disadvantaged communities, accompaniment in the process of change, the school-family-community relationship, educational practices in the classroom, the transition from elementary to secondary school, accompaniment for principals, teachers and students, the implementation of the success plan and the development of teaching practices, strategies for managing difficult behaviour and, finally, the use of new technologies.

Members of the NANS provincial steering committee and the research team at the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport were particularly interested in enriching their reflection on future orientations based on the comments and needs expressed by the schools.

The program focuses primarily on the adoption of habits fostering long-term success. For example, a school might learn more about disadvantaged communities, foster cooperation with parents or incorporate a 15-minute reading period at the beginning of the school day.

There were a number of surprises for participants. Rodrigue Létourneau, former principal of St-Anselme school, donned a Sol costume and did a stand-up routine on education and the reform. There was also a video of students at the target schools discussing success, their school, the work their teachers do, etc.

In the afternoon, Pierre Bergevin, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, Lyne Martin, coordinator of initiatives aimed at disadvantaged communities, Alain Veilleux, director general for the regions, and the members of the provincial steering committee engaged in a question and answer period with the audience.

The audience was emphatic about the need to renew the credits awarded to the target schools and about the importance of implementing the strategy with students from a very young age.

Marie Josée Lépine

Special Education Conference: Success Based on Differences

At the conference, organized by the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec in partnership with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, innovative practices and special education solutions were presented to elected officials, school board administrators, school principals and staff, and parents. The conferences, round-table discussion, forums and workshops were a springboard for reflection on the issues associated with the special education policy adopted in 2000.

The round-table discussion, moderated by journalist Françoise Guénette, addressed the challenges of integrating students with handicaps or learning or adjustment difficulties into the regular classroom. It was an unprecedented opportunity for people from different milieux to share and defend their point of view. Six distinguished guests were present: Pierre Bergevin, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, Rose-Marie Charest, president of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec, Johanne Fortier, president of the Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement, Céline Giroux, director general of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, Diane Miron, president of the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec, and Camil Turmel, representative of the Association des directeurs généraux des commissions scolaires.

Despite differences in how participants expressed their opinions, there was a consensus on a number of ideas. Pierre Bergevin began by pointing out that the goal of education is to do everything possible to ensure student success. However, "integration is a means and not an end in itself and, for some students, it is not an appropriate means." The participants expressed their agreement with integration, but not at any cost.

Johanne Fortier stressed the importance of providing support for students in difficulty as well as for staff, who are now faced with a more complex task.

Diane Miron brought up a second essential condition for integration: open-mindedness on the part of the teacher. "Few parents are against integration," she said. "Now we need to take action."

It is important to take an individualized approach to integration, that is, to take the student's personal interests into account. During the discussion, participants pointed out the importance of establishing an individualized education plan in cooperation with the family. They also recognized the advantages of collaboration among the different players.

Finally, should it be impossible to integrate a student into the regular classroom, marginalization should be avoided at all cost. According to Camil Turmel, "If a student cannot be integrated into a so-called regular class for whatever reason, it is important that he or she remain a full-fledged member of the school community."

The statistics presented by Lyne Martin, MELS coordinator of initiatives aimed at disadvantaged communities, speak for themselves: studies carried out in the various regions show that the dropout rate is higher among students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Dr. Julien works in eight elementary schools in different disadvantaged communities in Montréal. But isn't the dropout rate a secondary school problem? According to Dr. Julien, children acquire much of what they need to become motivated students long before they even begin school, i.e. between birth and age 4. "We need to motivate 4-year-olds and get them hooked on learning. Of course, it is not too late after 5 years of age, but it is more difficult."

Motivation, identity and a sense of belonging

Motivation is key to success in school. The active participation of a parent is a major asset. According to Dr. Julien, "we help bring parents to school to act as intermediaries." This enables them to project a positive image of school and to help their children stay motivated.

To help consolidate the family-school relationship, parents and their 3-year-olds can be invited to participate in activities with teachers and other staff members at school. "This approach focuses on helping parents realize the importance of their role," explains Dr. Julien, "in order to create partnerships and exchange information."

According to Dr. Julien, a sense of belonging (physical and emotional security) and identity are the cornerstones for building a desire to learn, pay attention and participate. In other words, they are the basis for development. Consequently, it is essential that teachers form relationships with their students, "sometimes to the point of replacing their parents at the emotional level. Secondary school students," he adds, "have the same needs, but a different approach is called for."

Offsetting failure with... success

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have often experienced multiple failures, resulting in a loss of motivation. Dr. Julien suggests doing everything possible to help them achieve success (in sports, artistic endeavours and school in general). "Although it is impossible to eliminate failure entirely, we must attempt to achieve a balance between success and failure."

Keeping students in school

In short, Dr. Julien proposes that the school, the community and the family work together in an atmosphere of trust to maintain motivation and provide accompaniment, and that they remain flexible.

he policy proposes means of helping students with special needs to succeed in the three target areas of instruction, socialization and obtaining qualifications, while taking into account that success can be interpreted differently for different students. The policy also includes measures for recognizing success.

Schoolscapes met with the workshop leaders to discuss the main challenges ahead as well as orientations that could facilitate the integration of students.

Q. In light of the questions and comments you have heard over the two days of the conference, what do you think is now the main challenge with regard to the ongoing implementation of the Policy on Special Education?

A. We see that, by and large, the schools are following the policy. But the big challenge is in applying the policy and renewing the practices recommended in it in the context of the education reform. That is why it is essential to support the schools (administrators and professionals) in developing practices in line with the favoured approaches.

Q. What is it about some schools that enables them to implement the policy more quickly than others?

A. Some schools are able to organize their services to take into account students' individual needs and capacities. These schools are dynamic and innovative. They apply the principles of participative management, that is, staff members are involved in decisions that affect students. In these schools, the organization of work allows for reflection as a team, along with dialogue and discussion.

Q. What do think is the most important message to get across to people or the message that it would be most important to clarify?

A. The fate of students with handicaps and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities should be on an equal footing with the other concerns of a school board or school. For example, a school's educational project and success plan should take these students into account, particularly with a view to prevention. An inclusive approach should be taken.

Q. You talked about the double challenge of implementing the Policy on Special Education and the education reform as a whole. In your opinion, what would help make this possible?

A. It's really a question of one major challenge. The policy is there to help apply the reform in the case of students with handicaps or difficulties. To achieve this, it is essential to provide staff with training and support, to promote teamwork, to show flexibility in the organization of work, to facilitate collaboration by students and their parents, and to use individualized education plans to determine the means best suited to the needs and capacities of each student.

Marie-Josée Lépine

Into the Future Hope and the Social Stage

At the end of the conference, Jacques Pipenni and his social theatre company put on a play entitled *Un voyage vers l'avenir*, a humorous foray to the year 2009, when Simon is admitted to CEGEP. Despite the learning difficulties Simon experienced in secondary school, the joint efforts of his mother, the school board and the school managed to help him maintain his motivation and fulfil his dream of becoming a composer. In 2009, it all pays off!

The objectives of the 2003 agreement on the complementarity of services are as follows: to ensure the continuity and complementarity of services offered to school-aged youth with handicaps or learning or adjustment difficulties; to ensure the quality of services and their availability in the young person's community, where possible; and to foster cooperation between institutions in the two networks.

The committee's values are based on partnership. "First, it is important to understand our respective missions, objectives and services," explains Monic Vézina. "Obviously, we insist on mutual respect, honest communication and real exchanges, all with a view to finding solutions."

Objectives:

The inter-institutional committee set itself four objectives:

- To assimilate the MSSS-MELS agreement and the local committee's action plan
- To consolidate a common vision and understanding of the needs of young people and their families in the territory of the MRC de Rivière-du-Loup, and of the network of services available to meet those needs
- To ensure a response adapted to the needs of young people and their families through concerted action
- To evaluate the actions of the local MSSS-MELS-MFCFA (Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine) committee related to the agreement

Mandates:

The mandates of the committee are as follows:

- To develop and implement a joint local action plan taking into account all partners, clients and elements
- To lead the community and organize joint training sessions
- To implement means of settling disputes quickly
- To produce an annual report on the implementation of the agreement

Concerted action:

The committee has addressed the following issues:

- The organization of the entire range of necessary services
- The development of a procedure and criteria, and dissemination of information with a view to providing quick and easy access to services
- Intervention and individualized service plans

According to Égide Royer, psychologist and special education professor at Université Laval, "the generalist training that teachers get in university today is insufficient to meet the needs of young people with behavioural disorders." Teachers in Québec feel like a chameleon on a Scottish kilt: completely overwhelmed and unable to adapt to everybody at the same time.

We now know that punishment does not work with most difficult students. "Punishment works with the majority of students, but it is ineffective with at-risk students and especially with students who demonstrate chronic aggressive behaviour," explains Royer. If punishment doesn't work, how can we deal with the problems caused by difficult students?

Take Steeve, for example. It doesn't take much for the situation to come to blows with Steeve. Rather than punish him continually without result, Égide Royer proposes a four-step process. First, he must be asked to stop hitting his classmates and shown the appropriate behaviour. He should express his discontent and explain what he feels. When a teacher sees him behaving positively, he or she should encourage him so that he knows that this is a better alternative to using his fists. Finally, he should receive positive reinforcement from all of his classmates.

In addition to finding alternatives to punishment, Royer indicates that there is a certain hierarchy that, unfortunately, many dysfunctional schools do not follow. "There are four levels of intervention: the teacher (e.g. when a student criticizes the teacher's appearance), the principal (e.g. when a student disrupts the entire class despite the teacher's interventions), the police (e.g. when a student threatens the teacher) and social services (e.g. when a student appears to be suicidal)."

Some schools have learned to deal successfully with young people with behavioural and discipline problems. These schools often share the following characteristics:

- Responsibility shared by the entire school
- Common values, shared by all the members of the school team
- Focus on the importance of success in school
- Minimal use of punishment
- A predictable and structured environment
- Evaluation that supports intervention
- Focus on the importance of personalized interventions

Students with behavioural difficulties are often very demanding, but "it is important to remember that their behaviour is often as much of a handicap as deafness. We would never hold a child responsible for his or her deafness, so why should a difficult child be responsible for his or her behaviour?" concludes Royer.

Réjane Bouge

Blue Metropolis:

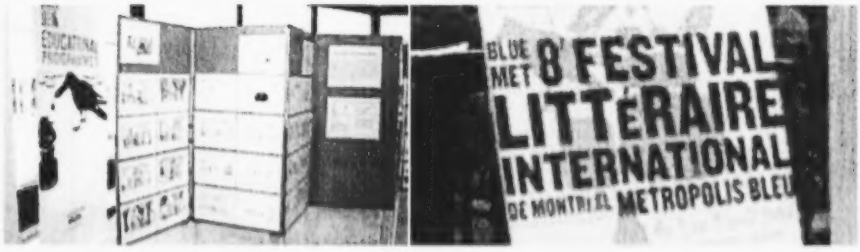
A Literary Festival With a Special Component for Young People

Looking for talent

Linda Leith, artistic director and founder of Blue Metropolis, believes it is important to enable young readers from every region and sociocultural background to develop a sense of creativity and to become familiar with the work of recognized writers and artists by talking to them. That is why, from almost the very beginning, she and her team set up a variety of educational programs. For these lovers of literature, finding talent has become a kind of mission! These activities are intended for students in elementary and secondary school and CEGEP. This component of the festival is so important that there is a full-time educational program coordinator, Maïté de Hemptinne, on staff.

Tried and true and something new

Bilingual activities take place throughout the year. For Halloween, Elementary Cycle Three students are invited to participate in an activity called *Peur bleue*. After listening to "scary" stories, students can ask the storytellers questions about their characters and storytelling techniques. This year, the activity took place at the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec. "This was a new partnership for us, even though the activity has been offered for the past four years," says de Hemptinne. She is particularly proud of the distance education programs that make it possible to interact with clients in remote areas. For example, elementary and secondary school students are invited to participate in a series of reading workshops over a 12-week period, in which authors, educators and students read, reflect on and discuss books. The activity is called *Québec Reads*. As well, there are writing workshops for Secondary IV and V students on the Web, given by authors. Other distance education programs are also offered: *Québec Roots*, an educational project for anglophone elementary and secondary school students in



Québec, helps them develop a better understanding of the role of English-language communities in Québec culture. *À livre ouvert : auteurs en direct* is a series of reading workshops for Secondary V French as a second language classes.

At the secondary level: Lipograms and comics

The most famous (and perhaps most difficult) lipogram in literary history is without a doubt the one by Georges Perec. The author set out to write an entire novel without using the letter "e." The result? The ironically titled *La Disparition*, a 300-page novel published in 1969. This is the challenge (writing a text without using a particular letter or letters) that has been offered to secondary school students with growing success for the past four years. Prizes include cash awards. Perec believed that applying rules increased creativity. Apparently the students who submitted the required five- to ten-line texts for the contest agree!

Don't Touch My Board, Man! is an album of comic strips published by Blue Metropolis in April. Some 400 copies were printed. The project, a collaboration between Blue Metropolis and the Bibliothèque de Montréal, was launched in 2004, with workshops on producing comic strips on the topic of bullying and taxing. This year, the workshops took place in schools, a more meaningful location given the theme. For about a month, four French- and English-language classes from five Montréal schools took part. Accompanied by professional authors and illustrators, as well as teachers and a psychoeducator, the students worked individually or in groups to present a collective work. The published comic strips included submissions selected by a jury, along with certain other favourites.

Student literary program

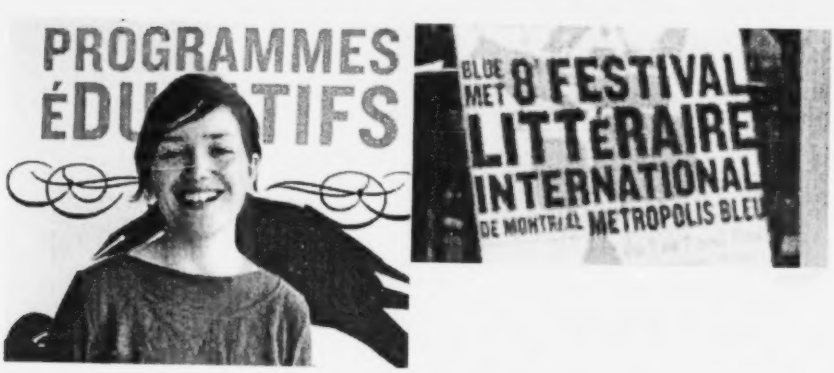
The Student Literary Program is another interesting festival activity. It involves meetings and creative writing workshops with well-known authors and is geared to small groups of Secondary IV and V and CEGEP students. Since its inception in 2000, the program has continued to grow in popularity. Although the meetings differ depending on the presenter, in general, the authors begin a workshop by discussing their career, then answer questions and, finally, give participants writing exercises, which are greatly appreciated. Melissa Auf Der Maur, Ann Charney, David Homel and Catherine Kidd are some of the authors who have taken part in the program. Starting off in the early years with about 100 participants, this year the program attracted almost 600! Although the majority of activities are free, there is a registration fee. *Schoolscapes* met with Isabelle Aubé, a teacher at François-Joseph-Perrault school in Montréal, who enrolled her students in the activity for the third year in a row, and Anka Porlier, a student in her class.

Over the years, Blue Metropolis has established increasingly solid and varied partnerships. If you would like to know more about the festival or if you would like to receive the list of activities for young people, visit the Web site at [illegible] or call 514-932-1112.

Isabelle Aubé has been teaching at Joseph-François-Perrault, a CSDM specialized school in Saint-Michel, a disadvantaged area of Montréal, for three years. Since 1978, the secondary school has offered a special classical music program. Aubé was immediately taken with the Blue Metropolis program, since it enabled her to stimulate the interest of her already enthusiastic students. She proposed that the students participate in a lipogram contest. The winners get a chance to participate in the Blue Metropolis Student Literary Program at the school's expense. Aubé signs them up for three workshops, for about two full days of activities. This year, some of her students were barely able to contain themselves, they were so eager to meet Patrick Sénécal, author of *Sur le seuil*, a hugely successful fantasy novel adapted for the screen.

Because she teaches the novel and short story—and poetry when she has the time, she points out with regret—Isabelle Aubé is particularly fond of the comic strip workshop. Working on this new genre with Jimmy Beaulieu "opened up a whole new horizon for them." Since she, too, participates in the workshops, she confirms that they are all different. "Some authors talk more about themselves, like Nelly Arcan last year. Others have participants do more writing exercises." She speaks in glowing terms of the enthusiasm created by this contact with "real" authors. "Having authors comment on their texts and suggest avenues to explore is invaluable. It's an incredible boost for the students' self-esteem." She adds that her students are often passionate about writing. Isabelle Aubé did not wait for Blue Metropolis to have her students meet with authors. She has always invited authors to speak to her class and will continue to do so. This year, she invited short-story writer Dominique Lavallée, author of *Étonnez-moi, mais pas trop!* And, a testament to the impact of Blue Metropolis, Yolande Villemaire, whom Aubé had been impressed with at the festival in 2005, agreed to meet with her students. Isabelle Aubé has also always had her students hone their writing skills. Last year, they wrote two short stories and a number of short productions. These activities are always long-term: the students work on their texts for several weeks. Herself a passionate reader, Aubé, who has always worked with students enrolled in international education programs, offers a long and varied reading list: Suzanne Myre, Luis Sepúlveda, Lisa Moore, etc. She firmly believes that meeting with authors makes all the difference. "The students really liked being at the Grande Bibliothèque. Not that they weren't already familiar with it, but they enjoyed the intimacy, the immersion in the world of books."

Anka Porlier, who has just graduated from secondary school, loves writing. She is also a fan of Patrick Sénécal, and very much enjoyed his fantasy horror novel *Aliss*. Sénécal was funnier than she thought: "His stories are so macabre and morbid! What a paradox! But he explained that writing helps him deal with his anxieties." Anka had always been told that it was important to prepare an outline before writing a text, but when Patrick Sénécal said the same thing, she was convinced. "It's not a particularly interesting exercise but I learned that you can't do much without a structure." Patrick Sénécal had participants write texts based on horror movie clichés: haunted houses, zombies, werewolves and vampires—the category Anka chose. Except that they had to try to dispel the clichés. "His comments were always relevant. He was never condescending with our group of amateurs." Anka also enjoyed the comic strip workshop,



although she says words are the only way she knows to express ideas. "I'm not good at drawing. I read comics, but I couldn't see myself creating one!" But, with Jimmy Beaulieu's guidance, that's exactly what she did, along with the other participants. "I also learned that cartoonists have more freedom than novelists." Anka says she has been writing since she was 6 years old. Since then she has written fairytales, short stories and even a song, for which she won first prize at a festival and in the Radio Canada *Ça me chante* contest. She liked the fact that Isabelle Aubé had them write so much. "This year, we focused more on creativity than on grammar and I found it extremely stimulating." She found the lipogram experience particularly interesting, as it helped her vary her vocabulary. "It was difficult, but it made us look up a lot of synonyms."

Does Anka want to be an author one day? "There are so many things I would like to write. For now, it's hard to concentrate on a single thing, but I hope I'll manage eventually." ◀

Philip Szporer

erary Program tropolis

hat sound initiative led Elson and her students to converge, along with hundreds of other educators and students, at the Blue Metropolis Festival's Student Literary Program, held this past April at the city's expansive Grand Bibliothèque. In this constructive environment, young writers come to understand and develop their personal writing style, and reflect on their own unique talents.

Elson's receptive students met Caribbean-Canadian writer, radio host, and one of Montreal's spoken word mainstays, Kaie Kellogh. He hit the ground running, describing how writers and artists use the world around them as a source for ideas and inspiration. Telling his own story, Kellogh worked with sound and cadence, mixing and re-mixing his riffs with tone, rhythm, and phonetics to mould musical sounds out of spare poetic imagery.

Originally from Calgary, Kellogh started writing in his late teens, first composing poems, and then performing them. He talked about how he began to write out of necessity in a need to express his own experiences. "Sometimes our histories aren't heard," he confided. What the students learned over the course of the morning was the process of engaging in history through thoughts, voice and language. Julien McLellan, 16, responded to Kellogh's workshop, saying, "[The session] was refreshing because it isn't everyday class work... There's a lot of culture and diversity in the presentation. We heard some black poems that we wouldn't otherwise."

Fittingly, Kellogh incorporates a rapper's freestyle approach and rhythm, giving exercises that show how language can be used to say things that come to mind. He encouraged the students to discover tools and strategies, and to learn how turns of phrase and stored ideas and images "allow you to start to engage."

The workshop hooked Sudip Ray-Chaudhuri, 16, who, for example, really enjoyed Kellogh's freestyle rapping. "It really helped me. Deep down inside, you know, I've got some thoughts, not really anger, but sad thoughts. He helped me to think I can express those thoughts in my writing."

For five minutes, the students "freestyled." The process encourages students to open up and liberate thoughts. Kellogh suggested, "Once your pen touches paper, you can't stop. Let the thoughts keep going." One student commented, "It goes fast." Another remarked there were "too

many thoughts in her head." When a student said that he found it easy, but that the writing didn't make much sense, Kellogh said, "Making sense is not the goal. It helps to discover connections between disparate ideas." Another mentioned that having a computer would simplify the exercise. In response, Kellogh countered, saying, that with a cursor "we have a tendency to delete."

Kellogh set another task using anagrams. Students extrapolated on the word "danger," transposing letters and creating new words with their own rhythm and sound: edge, ranger, renegade, gene, dredge, Eden, degree, deer, dear, engage, rearrange, egad, adder, grenade, gangrene, agenda. "It's about working within narrow limits," he said, "and becoming aware of greater vocabulary."

After the workshop thoughts trail off in contemplation. Khantutta-Kim Tremblay-Parrado, 16, was inspired. "As a teen, I figured out a bit of my identity here," she said. Referring to her love of "rap with meaning," Tremblay-Parrado really enjoyed Kellogh's hip-hop and reggae examples. "I'm well rounded in all my subjects, but [this is] always something I like doing."

Meanwhile McLellan, the kind of student who envisions a possible future writing fiction, said, "This workshop definitely got me more into poetry [and] sound. It's a lot more verbal and it gave me a broader view." Elson gives rousing support to the workshop: "This group loved Kaie Kellough!"

The next day, mouths open, eyes widen, and kids—from St. Patrick's High School in Québec City and Montréal's MIND High School—sit up and take notice when Toronto-based multilingual multidisciplinary artist and educator Naila Keleta Mae starts singing as she begins her session. She then talks of the "business about being artists and writers, and not skills sets." Up-front she asks the assembled 50 or so students, "What do you understand social justice to mean?"

This clearly is not your usual approach to learning—a point that Keleta Mae underscores throughout her remarks. "My expectations of you are great. Because I know your lives are great. You've seen a lot and have lived a lot," she tells the class. She talks about cultures "where the word for student and teacher is the same." She spins into a dub-poem about abortion. During her talk, she questions deeply dominant cultural hierarchies, censorship, issues of globalization, investigating how language is used to challenge systems and communities. "We can't be afraid to discuss" is her message. "Art is a vehicle to discuss."

Writing, she seems to be saying, is not for everyone—but then, maybe the students are not everyone. She encourages them to "keep analyzing, continue to interrogate." She reveals that she started writing, first through journals. "My style [was] close to hip hop." Other styles evolved, but she says, "Whatever I wanted it to be, I didn't want to be called poet, because that didn't have anything to do with me. Spoken word is good for me." Language, she says, is "a currency, a tool." And the toolbox, she admits, is as "big, wide, deep, narrow, constrained as we want." Writers adjust language, she says, which means talking to different generations in appropriate ways. At the base, there's the desire to "connect to someone, adjusting to communicate, to connect to fit in."

That afternoon, at another session, *Québec Roots: The Place Where I Live...*, anglophone students from six elementary schools, three high schools, and three adult education centres from around the province came together to talk about a community-based project in which community roots were explored through a photo-essay publication. The goal of the project was to instill the understanding that anglophones contribute to the diversity of the province.

Students were matched with professional writers and photographers. Mentor Claire Holden Rothman, paired with photographer Judith Lerner Crawley, worked with students in Kahnawake, Richmond, and Trois Rivières. "The mission was for the students to describe, to other children their age who'd never been there, the place where they lived." Contact between mentors and students was established through video conferencing. "It was a matter of getting down and dirty with their senses," she says. "We attempted to get into details, and trying to get them to write from their senses." Based on the audience response, the results were a resounding success.

The Student Literary Program encourages young people to discover and experiment with texts and ideas and, ultimately, to dig deep within themselves. They get to write and recite and explore the most important part of all creative activities—getting started. The message, along the way, is clear: "Do what you love." That's really the key.

Promoting democracy is a major challenge," says Diane Leblanc, vice-president of the National Assembly and the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant.

"When you look at countries like Sweden and Finland, where young people vote in great numbers (68 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds in Sweden, 65 per cent in Finland), you see that young people are very familiar with their political institutions and their respective responsibilities. One of the determining factors in the participation of young people in the electoral process is their level of civic competency."

The situation in Québec is very different. According to a Léger Marketing poll, 53 per cent of young people are unfamiliar with the National Assembly, while 70 per cent do not know the name of their MNA.

"To achieve our goal, it is important to get young people to participate in a democratic process," says Leblanc. Sweden and Finland have parliaments in a number of their public institutions, including secondary schools. The schools' governments are elected democratically and structured as parliaments. This gives young people the opportunity to learn how a democratic system functions. So when they are finally entitled to vote, they are aware of the electoral process and are more likely to participate."

Raymond Chrétien, a former school principal currently employed as a student life animator at Mont-de-La Salle secondary school in Laval, participates actively in the development of the Fondation's project by sharing his expertise as a founder of the student parliament program in 1996. Mont-de-La Salle is one of five schools field-testing the project and, so far, results have been promising.

"The student parliament is made up of elected and nonelected members," explains Chrétien. MPs, ministers and the prime minister are elected by the student body and are therefore official representatives. The chair, the speaker, the spokesperson, the secretary-general, the journalists who write articles for the school paper and the press officers who write press releases for the journalists, are not elected. All of these positions are filled by students."

"The beauty of having a parliament in secondary school is that there can be a Minister of the Environment or of Health. The students can table, debate and adopt policies governing their school, for example, policies on junk food, cultural diversity or smoking awareness."

"The school principal acts as lieutenant governor and works with the representatives. The student parliament must therefore obtain his or her approval for the legislative measures it adopts. Someone is also appointed by the school to act as a consultant, and all teachers are responsible

for fostering student participation in school life and various projects. In an institution such as Mont-de-La Salle, where students come from different cultural communities, it is important to ensure that cultural diversity is a part of every team and not a source of division. We are attempting to encourage students to become involved in their community."

Student parliaments are an important part of life in Finland and Sweden. Indeed, young people in these countries are obliged by law to participate and all schools have a democratically elected government structured as a parliament. In Québec, secondary schools are free to participate or not.

The objectives of the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant are ambitious. A five-year project was launched in 2005. Year 0 was a trial period in five pilot schools. The Fondation is aiming at an increase of 50 schools per year until 2011. Funding is equivalent to $1 per student per school. Half is provided by the Fondation and the other half by the school. The results are conclusive: once the project is implemented, the community and the school boards are capable of covering expenses related to logistics and the educational costs associated with the program.

"In my experience, student parliaments are an excellent means of creating learning situations, promoting integration, and fostering student participation and commitment. In addition to preparing young people for the future and developing a sense of citizenship, the project makes a real improvement in the quality of life in the school."

The educational document published by the Directeur général des élections du Québec confirms that many of the aims of the education reform can be met by similar projects involving the study of democracy, in particular the cross-curricular competency *Cooperates with others* and certain social sciences competencies related to the broad area of learning Citizenship and Community Life. According to the document, the development of such projects is justified by the fact that "schools are not only places where students acquire knowledge in a given area; they are also places where they learn to live as members of society." Setting up a school parliament and providing the necessary accompaniment may be key elements in the school life program for enabling students to "adopt responsible social behaviour based on the fundamental values of a free and democratic society."

In order to facilitate the implementation of the program, the Fondation has developed a guide for teachers and other school team members.

Useful links:

Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant Web site

Youth Web site of the Directeur général des élections du Québec

Sophie Gondreault

Virtual Storefront

Different ministries and agencies produce educational and promotional documents for schools. In order to ensure that these documents are consistent with each other and with the QEP, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has set up an interministerial committee on the harmonization of activities for schools. This committee, which has been operational for five years now, is made up of representatives of ministries and agencies that offer learning activities and educational materials for learning situations based on the QEP.

Committee members develop a better network culture and find better approaches for helping teachers develop authentic learning situations. Their projects are classified according to the broad areas of learning: Health and Well-Being, Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities, Personal and Career Planning, Media Literacy, and Citizenship and Community Life. The committee's objectives are to foster the harmonization of teaching materials produced by the different ministries and agencies with the QEP and to facilitate access to these materials by schools.

The following programs are offered by the different ministries and agencies that sit on the committee.

REVENU QUÉBEC

Taxes in Québec: Why We Pay Them and How They Are Used is aimed at Elementary Cycle Three and Secondary V students. The aim of the program is to introduce students to the Québec tax system and help them understand the purpose of taxation in a context of social justice and fairness. These materials, revised and updated every year, are available in both English and French.

COORDINATION DES SERVICES COMPLÉMENTAIRES (MELS)

The MELS has developed a document entitled *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*, aimed at students in preschool, elementary and secondary education. Topics include the human body, sexuality, sexual roles and stereotypes, and social norms. The document also addresses issues of concern to students: sexual orientation, male-female relations, sexual violence, teen pregnancy, STDs and AIDS.

OFFICE DE LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR (OPC)

The OPC offers several projects for Elementary Cycle Three teachers. One of these, *À vos boîtes à lunch*, helps students learn about proper nutrition. With the help of tips from the Canada Food Guide, students put together healthy lunches that meet their daily nutritional needs. The eight golden rules of lunch-making are listed on a sheet for students and their parents. The project also has an environmental component, which teaches students how to avoid harming the environment (by using plastic containers rather than plastic wrap, for example).

SOCIÉTÉ DE L'ASSURANCE AUTOMOBILE DU QUÉBEC (SAAQ)

To enable elementary school students to learn about pedestrian, bicycle and school bus safety, the SAAQ has developed a CD-ROM entitled *Chemin faisant… la sécurité routière à l'école*. The CD-ROM is primarily a self-directed learning tool containing almost 40 exercises of varying complexity related to the three types of safety. It is accompanied by a guide for teachers who would like to address the topic in the classroom, using different scenarios.

MINISTÈRE DE L'AGRICULTURE, DES PÊCHERIES ET DE L'ALIMENTATION DU QUÉBEC (MAPAQ)

Like the OPC, the MAPAQ wanted to develop elementary school teaching materials related to proper nutrition, but from a different perspective. Rather than address the different types of foods, the educational package entitled *Mes aliments, j'en prends soin* explains how to handle them. It was designed to help teachers address the issue of food hygiene and to carry out different learning activities enabling students to develop a variety of competencies. The projects, which include hand-washing and sampling demonstrations, help students understand the importance of acquiring good food safety habits.

KINO-QUÉBEC

With its *École active* competition for elementary and secondary school students, Kino-Québec encourages schools to come up with their own ideas. To participate, schools must devise a project on one of the following three topics: setting up or purchasing materials to foster physical activity, nutrition, or safety in physical activity and sports. In 2006, Kino-Québec will award more than $125 000 in prizes (a minimum of $3 500 per administrative region).

MINISTÈRE DE L'IMMIGRATION ET DES COMMUNAUTÉS CULTURELLES DU QUÉBEC (MICC)

Launched three years ago by the MICC, the *Jeunes scénaristes* contest is intended for Secondary III and IV students. This year, participants were asked to write a two-page text on the theme, "Le racisme, non merci!" ("Racism? No thanks!") The three winning teams had their texts adapted by the Institut national de l'image et du son (INIS) and produced in video format by Télé-Québec. The students were invited to the premiere of their video and met with the actors involved.

MINISTÈRE DES RESSOURCES NATURELLES ET DE LA FAUNE (MRNF)

The MRNF's *Parc faunique* project is intended to raise secondary school students' awareness of threatened animal species in Québec. The project revolves around a scenario in which a scientist has set aside an island for threatened species. The students must propose a plan for introducing the animals onto the island. The project involves concepts mainly from the areas of mathematics, science and technology: protection of habitats, plants and animals, ecosystems, biodiversity, etc.

MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX (MSSS)

In collaboration with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the MSSS implemented the *Healthy Schools* program for students in preschool, elementary and secondary education. The approach addresses the key factors of personal development: self-esteem, social skills, healthy lifestyle habits, healthy and safe behaviours, favourable environments and preventive services. These factors are associated with a number of problems related to success in school and the health and well-being of children and adolescents. The approach enables schools to create a positive atmosphere for students.

COMMISSION DE LA SANTÉ ET DE LA SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL (CSST)

For the past three years, the CSST has been inviting elementary and secondary schools and vocational training centres to participate in its *Défi prévention jeunesse*, intended to help young people develop preventive and safe behaviours before entering the labour market. By having students actively participate in educational projects aimed at prevention, the CSST intends to raise awareness of health and safety and encourage students to act responsibly with respect to their own health and safety and that of others.

MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE ET DES COMMUNICATIONS

In association with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications has created the *Culture in the Schools* program. The two ministries wanted to make it easier for public and private elementary and secondary schools to take the cultural dimension of learning into account. The program encourages teachers to organize cultural activities involving artists, writers and professional cultural organizations that reflect the spirit of the education reform and that promote openness to the world.

MINISTÈRE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE, DE L'INNOVATION ET DE L'EXPORTATION

The Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation supports the design and development of projects to facilitate the teaching of science and technology under the education reform. To this end, it has provided elementary and secondary school teachers with access to *Kaléidoscope*, a database of scientific tools and services that can be consulted by region, topic or target audience. It contains large amounts of information teachers will find useful in developing learning situations.

DIRECTEUR GÉNÉRAL DES ÉLECTIONS DU QUÉBEC

The Directeur général des élections du Québec has decided to offer workshops for elementary and secondary school students. The activities, aimed at raising awareness of Québec's democratic system, are given in schools upon request. The workshop for elementary schools is entitled *Un bon conseil* and helps student council members understand their duties and set up an effective democratic team. At the secondary level, *Un conseil d'élèves influent, dynamique et efficace* helps students develop individual and group leadership skills and carry out their duties effectively.

MUSÉE DE LA CIVILISATION

The Musée de la civilisation invites students at every level to participate in workshop visits. Each visit, conducted by a workshop leader/guide, is designed in accordance with the themes and content of the selected exhibition and is consistent with the QEP. The interpretation is supported by stimulating teaching materials and dynamic workshop leaders. Teachers can also use *Muséactivités* to enrich the program and students' experience.

Québec schools now have access to numerous projects and resources to enrich learning situations. For information on how to implement these projects or for any other information, consult the Web site of the Comité interministériel sur l'harmonisation des activités destinées au réseau scolaire at <**www.activiteseducatives.qc.ca**>.

Éducation,
Loisir et Sport
Québec

Ministry Code 13-0000-50A